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SUBJECT: TURKEY: ENVIRONMENTAL HIGHLIGHTS, APRIL 2003

REF: ANKARA 2287

(U) This is one of a series of cables providing updates on environmental issues in Turkey. Below are topics covered in this cable:

1. Update on merger of Environment and Forest ministries
2. Turkish scientists receive satellite data
3. Broad-based committee sets S&T priorities
4. Water basin management in Turkey
5. Lessons learned from water user associations
6. The chatter on WWF-Turkey
7. Ankara lawyers mark Earth Day
8. Turkey updates its flora database

1. THE LATEST ON THE MERGER OF MINISTRIES. On 5/1, Parliament began consideration of a proposal to merge the Ministry of Environment (MOE) into the Ministry of Forestry (MOF). The MOE expects Parliament's expeditious approval. By one estimate, the merger would take place within two weeks. With a merger expected to displace the current Environment Minister Kursad Tuzman, MOE Undersecretary Hasan Sarikaya may represent the MOE at the Kiev Environment for Europe Ministerial.

2. SCIENTISTS TAPS INTO DATA FROM TWO SATELLITES. Following an agreement between the Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK) and the European Space Agency (ESA), ESA satellite data became available to Turkish scientists in April. The data from two satellites -- ERS and ENVISAT -- will be used for geological, seismological and archeological studies; monitoring pollution, environment and land use; and scientific preparation for the Global Monitoring of Environment and Security.

3. BROAD-BASED COMMITTEE SETS S&T PRIORITIES. The 65-person Steering Committee of TUBITAK's "Vision 2023," the strategic document that will define S&T goals and priorities for the country's second hundred years, recently determined that priority S&T policies and practices will focus on increasing Turkey's competitiveness in the global market, developing S&T and innovation talent, promoting environmental sensitivity and energy efficiency, and improving quality of life.

4. TURKEY CRITIQUES ITS OWN WATER BASIN MANAGEMENT. At a workshop organized by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization on land and water resource management, representatives from government, international and NGO organizations took a hard look at Turkey's water basin management. Ismail Kucukkaya from the Ministry of Forestry said that Turkey lacks effective strategies for following a water basin approach to management. Water basins have insufficient infrastructure and poor income generation options for basin villagers, he said. Nermin Egeli from the General Directorate of Rural Services urged Turkey to update its basin land utilization plans and to establish protective zones, technical protection teams, disaster assistance teams, and monitoring plans.

5. LESSONS LEARNED FROM GAP WATER USER ASSOCIATIONS. In 1991, the State Hydraulics Works (DSI) transferred 1,270,000 ha of irrigated land (75 percent of Turkey's total irrigated land) to irrigation associations, water user groups and municipalities in the Southeastern Turkey Development Project (GAP) region in order to develop a model irrigation system. According to the GAP's Gonca Karaca, the project met with success in terms of providing modern irrigation techniques but lacked landowner involvement in project design, appropriately based water pricing (which she says should be based on volume, not acreage) and sufficient

training for irrigation managers. Ferayi Aslan, mayor of Adala in the GAP region, noted that the biggest problem of the 340 irrigation associations is inappropriate water pricing which discourages conservation.

16. WWF-TURKEY: CLOSER TO MERGER WITH LOCAL AFFILIATE. Since WWF-Turkey began its affiliation with DHKD (Foundation for the Protection of Nature) in 1975, the two have tested the waters of their relationship. In 2001, DHKD officially became the national arm of WWF International but it continued to use its highly recognizable DHKD logo as well as that of WWF-Turkey. Recently, DHKD members voiced concern that the merger would foster a negative public reaction to what will appear to be a non-Turkish organization using an unfamiliar name ("WWF"). However, DHKD board support for the merger remains firm. About 90 percent of WWF-Turkey/DHKD's projects are already administered under the WWF-Turkey name.

Meanwhile, WWF recently began discussing its 2003-2008 plan. New items on the agenda included a decision to press the GOT to designate additional "specially protected areas" and develop a strategy to protect those lands. WWF-Turkey also discussed the possibility of proposing that Ramsar establish a six-country Black Sea wetlands initiative, "BlackWet."

17. ANKARA LAWYERS NOTE EARTH DAY. In a seminar on "Environment, Man and War," several speakers noted that 35 percent of the world's environmental problems come from weapons testing and military exercises and operations. The program was sponsored by the Ankara Bar Association, the Chamber of Environmental Engineers, the Turkish Human Rights Protection Association (TIHAK), and the Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion, for Reforestation and for the Protection of Natural Habitats (TEMA).

18. TURKEY UPDATES ITS FLORA DATABASE. TUBITAK is updating TUBIVES, its database of national flora and vegetation. The project is part of a biodiversity project aimed at accounting for all living organisms in the country. TUBITAK, the State Planning Office and Izzet Baysal University are sponsoring the project.

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